

The Italian Hospital in London: 1884–1990

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ABSTRACT: The Italian Hospital in London was a voluntary hospital founded in 1884 to provide medical assistance, on a charitable basis, to the Italian community in the UK. Research conducted in local archives, contemporary newspapers and book literature, reveals the importance of the Hospital in the context of Anglo-Italian relations, whose developments it closely mirrored. An interplay between social, political and medical factors shaped the Hospital's fortunes until its closure in 1990. These factors include: the presence of a large community of poor Italian immigrants in need of the Hospital's services, its role as a symbol of UK – Italy cooperation and later as a political tool used by the Italian fascist regime, and the impact of the foundation of the National Health Service. With post-war prosperity, integration of the Italian community within British society and availability of free healthcare, the *raison d'être* for the Hospital ceased. Today, only the elegant building in Queen Square remains to testify to the past of this institution and its importance for Anglo-Italian relations.

KEYWORDS: Anglo-Italian relations; Italian immigration; Fascism; Voluntary hospital; National Health Service.

Introduction

The Italian Hospital stands on the South side of Queen Square, London. It is now part of Great Ormond Street Hospital and is used as an accommodation for families coming from outside London to visit their hospitalised child. The elegant architectural design, the “Italian Hospital” engraving on the façade and the coat of arms of

the House of Savoy (the Italian ruling dynasty until 1946) are the only remaining hints to this institution's past history and to its former prestige and importance for Anglo-Italian relations. Great Ormond Street Hospital purchased the building in 1990, when the Italian Hospital closed down. Its archives have been lost, however a substantial documentation on the Hospital's activities exists, in the contemporary press and spread across various London archives.

The present article examines the Italian Hospital's relevance from a social, political and medical viewpoint through the entire period of its existence. The Hospital's development is placed in the context of Italian immigration flows to the UK, and to London in particular, and of the historical vagaries of Anglo-Italian relations. The impact of these factors is examined with particular attention to the advent of Fascism, WWII, the creation of the National Health Service (NHS) and post-war economic prosperity.

From the Hospital's Foundation to the 1920s

The Founder

The Italian Hospital was founded in 1884 by Giovanni Battista Ortelli, who emigrated to England in the 1840s from Appiano, in the Northern Italian province of Como. He soon became a successful businessman and acquired substantial wealth.¹ Ortelli is representative of a first wave of Italian immigration to the UK, which took place in the first half of the 19th century: it consisted mainly of skilled, enterprising men from the Northern regions of Italy. These early migrants spread across the UK and established successful businesses in industries such as barometer and looking-glass manufacturing.² They spoke good

1. J. Hood, "The Later Ortellis and the London Colony 1825–1912", http://www.jeanhood.co.uk/late_ortellis.html [accessed 20 November 2017].

2. L. Sponza, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth Century Britain*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1988, p. 55.

English, were well integrated into British society and many married into British families.³ This first wave also included political exiles with a good level of instruction – among the best known are the poet Ugo Foscolo, the national hero Giuseppe Mazzini and Gabriele Rossetti, the father of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.⁴

The Context of the Foundation

In the latter half of the 19th century, a second wave of immigration occurred. These later Italian migrants were mostly poor and unskilled workers, who arrived in the UK in hope of a better life. In London, they settled in the area of Saffron Hill, which soon became a sort of Italian ghetto or “colony”, as it was usually referred to. This neighbourhood became infamous for the poor living conditions in overcrowded and insalubrious housing. Migrants often worked as organ grinders, ice cream and statuette sellers and in other petty occupations. Most could not speak any English and some not even Italian, but just their regional dialect.⁵

The Founding Myth

The foundation of the Hospital and the founder figure retained, throughout the Hospital’s existence, a sort of mythical character linked to the moral stature and the generosity of the founding father.⁶ Ortelli was a founding member of the Italian Benevolent Society, created in 1862 and aimed at helping Italian beggars on the streets,

3. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 129–131.

5. T. Colpi, *The Italian Factor*, Edinburgh, Mainstream Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 50–54.

6. H. Avery, “The Italian Hospital in London” (1962), p. 2. Document available at Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, reference A/01334/1/4.

children in particular.⁷ Frequently, poor boys were brought over from Italy by “padroni”, supposedly to teach them a trade, but in reality to send them begging on the streets.⁸

The Foundation

Ortelli decided to turn one of his properties into a hospital for Italians living in the UK, where Italian-speaking medical staff would be available to communicate with patients. The hospital would welcome people of all nationalities, although priority would be given to Italian nationals and Italian speakers.⁹ The Italian Hospital opened on the 1st of January 1884 at number 41, Queen Square, with a capacity of 26 beds. The medical staff comprised both Italian and British doctors and nurses from the Order of St Vincent de Paul, whose services were not retributed.¹⁰ As a voluntary institution, the Hospital depended for its existence on the charitable services of its staff, as well as on private and public donations.

Support from the Public

Ortelli was the most important contributor, but financial support was also obtained from well-off members of the Italian community and from the British public. Newspapers reported on the Hospital’s opening in a favourable light and encouraged British citizens to help the newly founded institution. A contemporary newspaper, *The Philantropist*, wrote:

7. Hood, http://www.jeanhood.co.uk/later_ortellis.html [accessed 20 November 2017].

8. “Italian Children”, *The Times*, 20 July 1877, p. 11.

9. G. Clinch, *Bloomsbury and St. Gile’s: Past and Present*, London, Truslove and Shirley, 1890, p. 190.

10. “The Italian Hospital Queen’s Square”, *Nursing Record & Hospital World*, 21 December 1901, p. 503.

We have no hesitation in saying that the foundation of the Ospedale Italiano in London is a wise and humane proceeding [...] it is in pressing need of funds for ordinary maintenance [...] our readers will have to help, especially in the way of annual subscriptions.¹¹

From the start, the Hospital encountered great success within both the Italian community and British society. In its first year of activity, the Hospital treated 1,754 outpatients and 102 inpatients¹² and by 1887 these numbers had risen to 7,998 and 673, respectively.¹³ In 1884, the percentage of Italian outpatients was 85%, but by 1889 this number had sunk to 45%, while 49% of outpatients were British.¹⁴ The number of patients increased to the point that the Hospital was finding it difficult to cope. Ortelli decided to acquire a house located next door¹⁵ and to undertake the construction of a larger building, which opened in March 1900.¹⁶ It had a capacity of 40 beds and was fitted with electric lights, an electric passenger lift and newly available X-ray equipment.¹⁷

Institutional Support

The Italian Government took interest in the Hospital: it decided to grant an annual donation and to appoint the Italian Ambassador to the UK as president of the Hospital. On the occasion of the first Italian

11. Avery, p. 10.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

13. "News from the Dioceses: The Italian Hospital, Queen Square", *Tablet*, 9 February 1889, p. 36.

14. "Italy in London Reconstruction of the Italian Hospital", *Daily Graphic*, 15 March 1900, p. 33.

15. G.N. Dani, "Onoranze al Cav. G.-B. Ortelli, Fondatore dell'Ospedale Italiano in Londra" (1889), p. 6. Document available at The British Library, General Reference Collection 10602.d.21. (6.).

16. *Daily Graphic*, 15 March 1900, p. 33.

17. Avery, p. 24.

Exhibition in London in 1888, the Italian Prime Minister Francesco Crispi offered his patronage. A year later, the Royal Houses of both Italy and Britain also became patrons and King Umberto I granted the use of his Royal coat of arms.¹⁸ From the very start, the Hospital acquired a symbolic status as a token of Anglo-Italian friendship and cooperation. This symbolic role was reinforced by the services it provided during WWI. When the war broke out, the Hospital placed beds for wounded soldiers at the disposal of British authorities¹⁹ and when Italy entered the war on the side of the Entente in May 1915, medical examination of recruits for the Italian army was carried out by the Hospital's medical staff. Honours were awarded by the King of Italy for its services.²⁰ Numerous visits by members of both countries' Royal Houses and Governments followed, up to the very eve of WWII.²¹

Professional Support

In order to work at the Italian Hospital, it was necessary for physicians and surgeons to hold the MRCP or the FRCS, or their Italian equivalents – *Libero Docente in Clinica Medica* or *Clinica Chirurgica*.²² Reputed physicians and surgeons, both Italian and British, accepted to work at the Hospital without retribution and, as a consequence, the Hospital's status and reputation rapidly rose. For instance, in the 1932 Annual Report the listed medical staff comprises Sir George Lenthal Cheatele – eminent surgeon, Sir St Clair Thomson

18. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

19. K.G. FitzAlan, "Italian Hospital, Queen Square, London, W.C. 1. Free to All Nationalities" (October 1934), p. 1. Document available at Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, reference A/01334/1/8.

20. Avery, p. 41.

21. Italian Hospital Annual Report 1938, p. 15. Document available at Wellcome Library, shelfmark WX28.BE5 L84I88 55th.

22. Avery, p. 28.

– eminent ear, nose and throat specialist and Sir Aldo Castellani – famous pathologist and bacteriologist,²³ later physician to the Italian Royal House and Mussolini, as well as surgeon general of the Italian army in Ethiopia.²⁴

Following a request for assistance by Orтели himself, the Hospital received the support of the Prince of Wales Hospital Fund,²⁵ later to become the King Edward’s Hospital Fund. This was regarded as a certificate of good quality and contributed to the reputation and prestige acquired by the Hospital. It was a source of great pride for the Italian community that a charitable institution, originally founded for the relief of the poor, had become a reputable hospital in London, where specialist care from some of the most eminent physicians and surgeons in the country could be obtained free of charge.

Reasons for success: the “Italophiles” and the Italian public

The initial success of the Italian Hospital can be attributed to the context of the time: the *Risorgimento* – Italy’s struggle for unification – and its main actors had gathered considerable sympathy among social and intellectual elites in the UK;²⁶ this feeling was later confirmed and reinforced by the alliance during WWI. The Hospital benefited from the support of many British “Italophiles” – persons who had a special sympathy for Italy and the Italian people – expressed, in particular, in the form of legacies and endowments of beds. For example, in 1928 Miss E.J. Barling from Halifax left one-

23. Italian Hospital Annual Report 1932, p. 8. Document available at Wellcome Library, shelfmark WX28.BE5 L84188 49th.

24. A. Castellani, *A Doctor in Many Lands*, New York, Kessinger Legacy Reprints, 1960.

25. Letter by G.B. Orтели to Prince of Wales Hospital Fund, 18 June 1897. Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/266.

26. U. Marin, “Italiani in Gran Bretagna”, <http://portale.lombardinelmondo.org/nazioni/Europa/Articoli/studiric/marin10> [accessed 20 November 2017].

third of her residuary estate to the Italian Hospital, with the following words:

For the Italian Hospital, Queen Square, London, as an evidence of my admiration of their splendid patriotism and loyalty to their allies and the great service they rendered to the world in preserving civilisation during the Great War.²⁷

Even more important, however, was the presence of a continuously replenished *reservoir* of poor Italians, unable to speak English, and therefore in need of the Hospital's services. Positive perception of the Hospital in the Italian community was key in prompting donations: the Hospital relied on this *reservoir* in order to advertise itself as an indispensable charitable institution. This gave legitimacy to the Hospital's existence and to its claim for support.

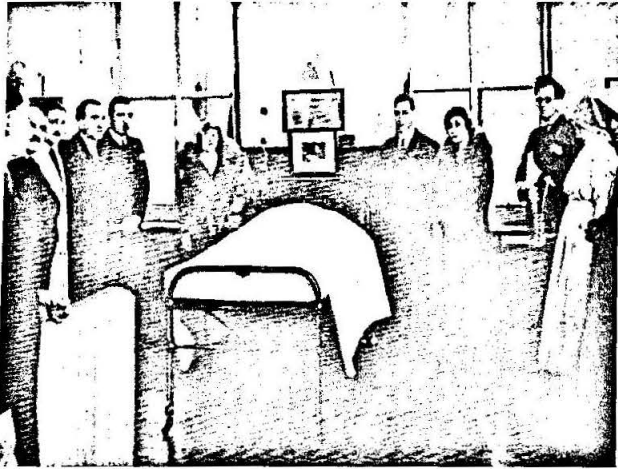


Figure 1. Baron Albert Profumo, owner of insurance companies and father of future UK Minister John Profumo, endows a bed at the Italian Hospital in 1932. Image from the 1932 Italian Hospital Annual Report.

27. Avery, p. 50.

Post-WWI difficulties

Despite the favourable atmosphere described, in 1920 stricter immigration policies were adopted by the UK and, a few years later, the fascist regime in Italy officially prohibited emigration.²⁸ As a consequence, the number of Italian migrants started to decrease. This, combined with the progressive integration of earlier migrants, depleted the *reservoir* and meant that the need for the Hospital's services was levelling off. During the 1920s, the Hospital experienced increasing difficulty in gaining support from the Italian community²⁹ and had to close for several months.

The rise of Fascism and the Second World War

The fascist regime and its outreach

After accessing power in 1922, the Italian fascist regime progressively set eyes on the large Italian communities abroad. The Italian community in London, which by 1930 comprised approximately 30,000 people, was a target of key strategic importance.³⁰ The Hospital's potential as a means for reinforcing the fascist party's control on the Italian community was soon recognised, and fascist efforts to gain influence ensued. A new Italian ambassador to the UK was appointed in 1932 and became president of the Hospital: Dino Grandi. He was an important figure in the fascist party and indeed is often regarded by historians as the only potential rival

28. M. Strazza, "Il Fascismo e l'Emigrazione negli Stati Uniti", [accessed 20 November 2017].

29. Letter by E.A. Last-Smith, Vice-Chairman of the Committee of Management, to King Edward's Hospital Fund, 28 April 1941. Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/267.

30. C. Baldoli, "The Remaking of the Italian Community in London: L'Italia Nostra and the Creation of a Little Fascist Italy during the 1930s", *London Journal*, 26, 2001, pp. 23–34.



Figure 2. *Italian Ambassador Dino Grandi and Foreign Secretary John Simon in 1932. Image from la Bibliothèque Nationale de France.*

of Mussolini, who sent him to London in order to upgrade relations with the UK, but also to keep him at a distance.

That same year, Commendator Carlo Camagna, Secretary of the Italian *Fascio di Londra*, received a seat on the Management Committee, and facilities were afforded to the *Fascio* for conducting a “Free Fascist Clinic for Italian Children.”³¹ In an open letter to the Italian community published in 1934, Grandi exhorts the public to donate to the institution, whilst reminding everyone that “assistance, in all its shapes, is an essential activity of the Regime” and that “all the Italians in

the UK will give, in this field too, an example of fascist discipline, intelligence and generosity.”³²

However, the fascist regime also enjoyed support from British “admirers”: in 1933, a donation of £1,005 was received “from a group of British admirers to endow a bed, which was unveiled and dedicated to Signor Mussolini.”³³ In a telegram acknowledging the gift:

31. Annual Report 1932, p. 23.

32. D. Grandi, “Agli Italiani di Gran Bretagna” (12 August 1934), pp. 1–2. Document available at Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, reference A/01334/1/8 (my translation).

33. “Orbis Terrarum”, *Tablet*, 3 June 1933, p. 24.

The Duce expressed his deep appreciation of such a practical expression of sympathy [...] “a proof of the friendly spirit of cooperation which unites the people of the two countries.”³⁴

Consequences of Fascist Policies

The attempt by the fascist regime to use the Hospital as a political tool meant that an increasing strain was being placed on its function as a means of Anglo-Italian cooperation. In the Hospital’s beginnings, members of the Management Committee and of the medical staff were mostly Italian. However, over time, an increasing number of British members had become involved. By 1932, the Management Committee consisted of 14 British and 7 Italian members. The British representation in the medical staff was even stronger, with a total of 17 British members out of 21.³⁵ A campaign was launched for the “Italianisation” of the Hospital and its first target was the British-dominated medical staff. By June 1935, its relations with the Management Committee had deteriorated,³⁶ due to a disagreement over the latter appointing several “temporary members” to the medical staff.³⁷ Rules were modified in order to award these “temporary members” a seat and a vote on the medical staff Committee. One particular appointment was hotly contested: the appointee was a prominent fascist, with both Italian and German qualifications. The Secretary of the Hospital himself noted that this appointment caused “real danger of racial feeling.”³⁸ The Management Committee received “a petition [...] from 7 medical

34. “The Hospital World”, *British Journal of Nursing*, June 1933, p. 154.

35. Annual Report 1932, pp. 6–8.

36. “The Italian Hospital Resignation of the Medical Staff”, *Supplement to the British Medical Journal*, 29th June 1935, pp. 310–311.

37. “Italian Hospital: Medical Staff” (December 1935), p. 5. Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/266.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

practitioners and 700 Italian residents asking for his appointment”,³⁹ suggesting therefore that a specific campaign, based on political considerations, had been carried out within the Italian community in order to support this appointment.

Resignation of British Members of the Medical Staff

The situation reached a breaking point with the Management Committee's untactful handling of a complaint involving a honorary surgeon, most probably British. Again, the Management Committee was accused of ignoring the medical staff's objections; eventually 14 members of the medical staff resigned, all of them British. This power struggle is reflected in an article printed in the British Medical Journal in June 1935, which concludes that

the appointment of practitioners of lower qualifications and less experience [...], the alteration of the rules of the hospital for the specific purpose of regularising these appointments, and the decision to give the practitioners appointed [...] a position and a vote on the medical staff Committee – all these steps taken without consulting the medical staff – [...] have created a position which the staff of the hospital cannot but consider to be detrimental to the hospital and the public.⁴⁰

Although the British medical staff invoked the safety of patients as its main concern, it is likely that they resisted what they saw as an attempt by fascists to take over the Hospital's managing bodies.

Resignation of British Members of the Management Committee

The Italian members of the Management Committee soon turned against its British component. In July 1937, the Management

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Supplement to the British Medical Journal*, 29 June 1935, pp. 310–311.

Committee's Chairman, Marquess Bernardo Patrizi, "intimated the wish of the Italian element to have control of the Hospital to the exclusion of the British members."⁴¹ Six out of eleven British members of the Committee decided to resign, among whom Vice-President Viscount K.G. FitzAlan of Derwent, who had been a stalwart supporter of the Hospital for many years.⁴² This episode was discussed in the British press and further prejudiced the Hospital's image, at a time of growing tension between the two countries. It also shows that the Hospital's symbolic role was vulnerable to manipulation for political ends. The 1938 and 1939 Annual Reports indicate however that, while the proportion of Italian members on the Management Committee and in the medical staff did increase, a solid British representation was maintained.^{43,44}

The Second World War

When the war broke out on 3rd September 1939, the Management Committee promptly offered to place some beds at the disposal of the Ministry of Health and established a first aid post.⁴⁵ This reflects the ambiguity of Italy's position until its entry in the war in June 1940. At that moment, Italian members of the Hospital's managing body were excluded, but British members remained and

were determined to show that the spirit of the founder of our institution still remained with us. Signor Ortelli had recognised no

41. "Meeting of the British Members of the Committee of Management" (5 October 1937), pp. 1–2. Document available at Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, reference A/01334/1/9.

42. Letter by K.G. FitzAlan, Vice-President of the Committee of Management, to Ambassador Grandi, 11 October 1937. Document available at Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, reference A/01334/1/8.

43. Annual Report 1938, pp. 6–8.

44. Italian Hospital Annual Report 1939, pp. 6–8. Document available at Wellcome Library, shelfmark WX28.BE5 L84188 56th.

45. Avery, pp. 57–58.

boundaries of nationality, race or religion where charity was concerned, so we retained the name – the Italian Hospital – and kept the wards and out-patients clinics open.⁴⁶

The Hospital ran an entire year exclusively under British management,⁴⁷ a fact stressed to gain support from the potentially hostile British public.⁴⁸ The Chairman Sir Ronald Graham, former British ambassador to Italy, asked members who had resigned in 1937 to return.⁴⁹ Despite their efforts, the Hospital closed in June 1941.⁵⁰ However, the Committee continued to meet regularly for the entire duration of the war with “the object to conserve and augment the funds of the hospital so that it could be repaired and re-opened as soon as circumstances would permit.”⁵¹

From the Postwar Period to Final Closure

The Political Context

WWII ended in Europe in May 1945. In November, the – entirely British – Management Committee met and “decided to open the Hospital as soon as possible and to invite the participation of the representatives of the Italian Nation as soon as they should be accredited and arrive in this country.”⁵² The damage sustained during

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 58–59.

47. Italian Hospital Annual Report 1940, p. 4. Document available at Wellcome Library, shelfmark WX28.BE5 L84I88 57th.

48. Letter by Universal Cookery and Food Association to King Edward’s Hospital Fund, 12 March 1941. Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/267.

49. E.A. Last-Smith to King Edward’s Hospital Fund, 28 April 1941.

50. Letter by the Secretary of the Italian Hospital to King Edward’s Hospital Fund, 16 June 1941. Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/267.

51. Avery, p. 59.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

the war and the disuse of the following years meant that the Hospital was in very poor condition. This however was not the only factor affecting the Hospital's reopening. The Beveridge Report, published in December 1942, had proposed the creation of a welfare system providing nationalised health care, free at the point of use. This proposal contributed to Labour's landslide victory in the 1945 general election. In 1946, the National Health Service Act was adopted: it foresaw the acquisition by the State of all voluntary hospitals, bar a specific exemption granted by the Ministry of Health.

The Italian Hospital remains outside the NHS

Although incorporation into the NHS was certainly considered by the Hospital's managing bodies, no references to this can be found in the available documentation. In his May 1947 letter to the Minister of Health, the Management Committee's lawyer invoked the following motive for the decision to remain outside the NHS:

The Committee, anxious as they are to preserve [...] the national character and tradition of the Italian Hospital, strongly urge that, if it is found possible to exclude any voluntary hospital in the area [...] the Italian Hospital has a very special claim to be excluded.⁵³

The Committee urged the Minister of Health to exercise the discretion conferred upon him by Section 6 (3) of the Act, which gave him the power to exclude any hospital from the takeover. It is interesting that an exclusively British Committee would be so fondly attached to the Italian character of the Hospital: even after WWII, the original "Italophile" commitment remained untouched. The Hospital's size was the probable reason that allowed it to retain

53. Letter by H. MacMaster, lawyer to the Italian Hospital, to Minister of Health the Right Honourable Aneurin Bevan, 14 May 1947. Document available at Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, reference A/01334/1/10.

its independence. In fact, a Survey report by the Ministry of Health on the London hospital services concluded that the Hospital would not be required:⁵⁴ 54 beds were unlikely to make a difference to the NHS in this part of London, which was amply provided with hospital care.

The reopening of the Italian Hospital

When the NHS was launched, on 5 July 1948, the Italian Hospital retained its independence with the status of voluntary hospital. However, as mentioned earlier, the Hospital was in poor material conditions. The Committee's eagerness to reopen as soon as possible⁵⁵ meant that outpatient clinics started in January 1948, before any renovation work could be undertaken. In a letter to the King Edward's Hospital Fund, a member of the staff gives a striking account of the situation:

As a result of the snow, the temperature in the dispensary was 32°F, and that in the surgery 40°F [...] the hospital was without essential equipment as rubber gloves, stethoscope etc, and working conditions were almost impossible, the lack of heat and running water being the worst obstacles – I had to carry buckets of water into the surgery.⁵⁶

The winter of 1948 was especially bitter, and central heating in the Hospital was not yet working. Dr Avery, a senior physician,

54. Letter by F.W. Beek, UK Ministry of Health, to the Chairman of the Italian Hospital, 25 July 1947. Document available at Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, reference A/01334/1/10.

55. Letter by A. Burnett Brown, architect to the Italian Hospital, to the Ministry of Health, 17 January 1947. Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/267.

56. Letter by M.H. Porter, pharmacist to the Italian Hospital, to King Edward's Hospital Fund, 5 March 1948. Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/267.

recalls how “doctors sat in their overcoats and examined patients in front of a small gas fire, which never gave a great deal of heat, and with gas-pressure often very low, owing to a shortage of gas in London at the time”, and how the staff was surprised that

patients came at all. But they did come – and were happy to come – for here was an Italian Hospital once again, where recently arrived Italians who knew no English, or only a smattering such as “Cheerio” which meant both a greeting and a farewell, could come and pour out their tale of woe to sympathetic ears.⁵⁷

The Third Wave of Italian Immigration

In the previous passage, Dr Avery alludes to the third wave of Italian immigration in the UK, which started right after the war. Italy’s economy was in ruins and the UK, a traditional destination for Italian migrants, was in need of manual labour. This new wave consisted mostly of unskilled labourers from Southern Italy, who found employment in factories and coalmines.⁵⁸ While previous Italian immigration had concentrated in London, this third wave spread across the country and this was reflected in the places of origin of the Hospital’s patients. They came not only from London, but in increasing numbers from the rest of the UK “often [...] from long distance [...] as far as North Wales, Cardiff, Peterborough, Bedford and East Anglia.”⁵⁹ Patients were also sent to the Hospital by NHS doctors from across the UK. The majority of cases were patients deemed too difficult to deal with because of language problems.^{60, 61}

57. Avery, p. 61.

58. Colpi, pp. 144–145.

59. Avery, p. 62.

60. Note by A.B. King, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon at St James’ Hospital, 30 May 1961.

Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/267.

61. Annual Report 1964, pp. 65–67.

The NHS and the Italian Hospital

The NHS and the Ministry of Health seemed to have a favourable opinion of the Hospital's activities. The useful role of the Hospital was recognised by representatives of the King Edward's Hospital Fund in their 1955 visit report: "the Hospital serves a useful purpose in relieving the pressure of beds in other quarters."⁶² The interest displayed by the Ministry of Health towards the Italian Hospital culminated in the attendance by Minister Enoch Powell as the guest of honour at the 1962 Italian Hospital Annual Ball. On this occasion Enoch Powell enthusiastically endorsed the Hospital's activities: "we in the National Health Service [...] welcome instead of rejecting the additions to our Capital – to our hospitals – which voluntary efforts can make. We welcome and would like to have more."⁶³ However, moral support from the Government never translated into a material one, despite the Hospital's repeated appeals for compensation with regard to patients sent from NHS hospitals.^{64, 65}

A Period of Renewed Support

The arrival of post-war Italian immigrants meant that, for a time at least, there was a clear need for the Hospital's services. This translated into a revival of interest and support, allowing the Hospital to

62. King Edward's Hospital Fund, "Italian Hospital, Queen Square, W.C. 1. Report" (January 1955), p. 2. Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/267.

63. "The Italian Hospital Queen Square – London W.C. 1 The Annual Dinner and Ball held at the Criterion in Piccadilly on 14 February 1962 under the Presidency of: His Excellency The Italian Ambassador", pp. 5–6. Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/267.

64. King Edward's Hospital Fund, "Italian Hospital Report on Investigation" (October 1959), p. 3. Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/267.

65. Letter by the Secretary of the Italian Hospital to the King Edward's Hospital Fund, 12 June 1961. Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/267.

recuperate and to enjoy a period of stability. Representatives of the King Edward's Hospital Fund had visited the Italian and the French hospitals and had reported that "in 1957 both were in a deplorable state materially, they seemed not to have recovered from the war" and that "the Italian Hospital lacked direction and seemed unlikely to pull out of its troubles."⁶⁶ In 1959, to the contrary "the old depressing atmosphere was gone and the place seems alive."⁶⁷ A "League of Friends" of the Italian Hospital was founded in 1956 as a means to encourage sustained support from the Italian community. In the beginning, it counted 91 members,⁶⁸ but by 1960 the membership had risen to 525⁶⁹ and the League had established "a considerable list of subscribers [...] both in the Italian colony in England and in Italy itself."⁷⁰

The Reservoir is emptying

The situation began to change during Northern Italy's economic boom – known as the *miracolo economico* – when the Italian migration pattern shifted from an external to an internal one, and most migration took place between Southern and Northern Italy. At the same time, integration of post-war immigrants meant that the number of poor, non-English-speaking Italians was declining. The historical *raison d'être* of the Hospital, that had guaranteed strong support among the public, was being put into question. Furthermore, another of the

66. King Edward's Hospital Fund, "The French and Italian Hospital" (January 1960), p. 1. Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/267.

67. King Edward's Hospital Fund, "The Italian Hospital Annual Visit Report" (December 1959), p. 1. Document available at London Metropolitan Archives, reference A/KE/C/02/06/267.

68. Italian Hospital Annual Report 1957, p. 10. Document available at Wellcome Library, shelfmark WX28.BE5 L84I88 74th.

69. Italian Hospital Annual Report 1960, p. 14. Document available at Wellcome Library, shelfmark WX28.BE5 L84I88 77th.

70. "The Italian Hospital Annual Visit Report" (December 1959), p. 1.

Hospital's historical purposes was becoming obsolete. After the war, the Hospital had resumed, at first, its role as a symbol of Anglo-Italian friendship. In 1951, Alcide De Gasperi – the first Prime Minister of the newly-founded Italian Republic – paid a visit and promised government support involving a yearly donation of £10,000,⁷¹ and the following year, Queen Elizabeth II accorded her Royal patronage.⁷² However, as the UK and Italy became close allies within NATO, and members of institutions such as the Council of Europe and the OEEC, the need for such symbols of cooperation waned. The progressive integration within the European Communities, following UK accession in 1973, deepened this evolution.

Finding Solutions: Private Patients

In this context, the purpose of the Hospital had to be reconsidered. Costs were rising exponentially, while support was declining. In order to maintain income, private and semi-private beds were introduced. By 1984 only 25% of patients were treated without any charge.⁷³ The Committee argued that “the surplus generated by the care of the private patients [...] was needed to provide for the present level of free provision” and that “the more private patients income we receive the more charitable patients can be treated.”⁷⁴ By then, 96% of the Hospital's budget was financed via private patients' fees and only 3% stemmed from donations and other fundraising activities.⁷⁵

71. “Italian Hospital Report on Investigation” (October 1959), p. 1.

72. Avery, p. 69.

73. “Italian Hospital: a Century of Care” (1984), p. 2. Document available at Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, reference A/01334/1/6.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

75. *Ibid.*

Specialising in Surgery

The Hospital underwent another important development: private beds were increasingly occupied by surgical cases. The 1970s saw the introduction of specialized surgery, in particular of open-heart surgery. In due time, the Hospital was supporting a major cardiac surgery programme. Many of the patients undergoing heart surgery were flown in from Italy, where such specialized procedures were not yet available, and operated privately at the Hospital. Costs were covered by the various Italian regional health systems.⁷⁶ Despite the Committee emphasising that many of the private patients were “Italians from Italy itself”,⁷⁷ most of the patients were in fact not Italian at all: e.g. in 1980, out of 1,165 inpatients only 323 were Italian.⁷⁸

Consequences on the Public’s Perception

Although income derived from private activities was essential for the Hospital, this development dramatically affected the Hospital’s image within the Italian community. In 1980, support was so low that the Italian ambassador set up a committee to investigate the community’s feelings towards the Hospital and whether it should continue its operations at all.⁷⁹ As reported in the minutes of the League of Friends meeting, President Lady Thorneycroft remarked that the Hospital had been criticized for not being close enough to the Italian community: in the recent past.

76. “A Londra ma senza lista d’attesa”, *Il Tempo*, 27 January 1982, p. 11.

77. “Italian Hospital: a Century of Care” (1984), p. 4.

78. *La Voce degli Italiani*, 15 January 1982, pp. 8–9.

79. League of Friends of the Italian Hospital, “Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on the 15 January 1980 at the Italian Hospital”, pp. 3–4. Document available at Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, reference A/01334/2/6.

the Hospital was greatly used by Arabs and other nationalities [...] now the Arab occupancy has fallen in line with policy set by the Committee of Management, to make the Hospital more Italian [...] we in fact want more Italians in those beds.⁸⁰

It was finally decided that the Hospital should continue and that efforts should be exerted to make it more relevant to the Italian community.

Efforts to remain competitive

If the Hospital was to maintain its attraction for private patients, it needed to provide the same standard of care and to acquire the same advanced equipment available at NHS hospitals. Rising costs and emergence of new expensive technologies were proving a heavy financial burden for a small Hospital of 54 beds. Nonetheless, by 1984 an ambitious plan was under way which foresaw the fitting of 15 new private beds, a twin operating theatre suite and an Intensive Care Unit.⁸¹ By 1986 hopes were high that “the hospital is currently entering a very exciting phase of the development with the completion of the new theatres [...] once these are open the hospital will provide facilities comparable to those in top London hospitals.”⁸²

The End

The Hospital’s last endeavour at renewing the public’s interest for its activities was an ambitious one, but despite attempts at

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

81. League of Friends of the Italian Hospital, “Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on Thursday 5 July 1984 in the Boardroom of the Hospital”, p. 4. Document available at Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, reference A/01334/2/6.

82. League of Friends of the Italian Hospital, “Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on Thursday 10 April 1986 in the Boardroom of the Hospital”, p. 4. Document available at Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, reference A/01334/2/6.

publicising the new facilities and at encouraging members of the Italian community to use them, demand did not follow. In 1989, the difficult decision to close the Hospital was taken and the Trustees met on several occasions to discuss sale modalities. In December 1989, the Italian ambassador Boris Biancheri sent a letter to various newspapers of the Italian community announcing the Hospital's closure. He justified the decision with the following words:

With the assimilation of the Italian community and the use made of the NHS, the needs for which the Hospital was founded have gradually faded. Moreover, had the Hospital to survive, the advances in medical science would require a substantial injection of new capital. The Trustees have considered various schemes of obtaining new capital but none of them would enable the Hospital to remain both financially viable and maintain its charitable objectives.⁸³



Figure 3. A goodbye from the Italian Hospital. Image from the 1961 Italian Hospital Annual Report.

In the Deed of Foundation, Ortelli had asked that, if the building were to be sold, funds should be invested in a charitable institution dedicated to assisting Italians in the UK or in his hometown of Appiano.⁸⁴ To this day, the Trustees administer remaining assets via the Italian Hospital Fund, later renamed the Italian Medical Charity, which helps Italians in the UK with their healthcare costs.⁸⁵

Independent Scholar

83. B. Biancheri, "Ospedale Italiano", *Londra Sera*, December 1988/January 1989, pp. 6–7.

84. H. MacMaster to Aneurin Bevan, 14 May 1947.

85. Italian Medical Charity, <http://www.italianmedicalcharity.co.uk> [accessed 20 November 2017].